

Message Text

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C O N F I D E N T I A L ROME 8905

E.O. 11652: GDS
TAGS: MPOL, NATO, IT
SUBJECT: LTDP--CONTINUED RESERVATIONS BY ITALY

REF: (A) ROME 8827, (B) STATE 121778

1. THE REFERENCED MESSAGES APPARENTLY CROSSED IN TRANSMISSION. REF A REPORTS GROWING INDIGNATION AT MINISTERIAL LEVEL WITH U.S. PRESSURES ON ITALY TO REMOVE FOOTNOTES TO LTDP. ITALIANS CLEARLY UNDERSTAND IMPORTANCE WE ATTACH TO THE LTDP AS A CENTERPIECE OF THE MAY SUMMIT. WE THINK THEY UNDERSTAND TOO THE OBJECTIVE IMPORTANCE OF THE LTDP EXERCISE. BUT IT SEEMS CLEAR WE HAVE REACHED THE POINT WHERE CONTINUED EXHORTATION WILL ONLY FURTHER HARDEN THE ITALIAN POSITION ON THE PROGRAM WITH POSSIBLE DAMAGING REPERCUSSIONS ON OTHER ENTERPRISES, BOTH BILATERAL AND ALLIED.

2. SUBSEQUENT TO DISCUSSIONS REPORTED REF A, POL/MIL COUNSELOR HAD CONVERSATION WITH GENERAL D'AMBROSIO, VICE CHIEF OF CABINET TO MINISTER RUFFINI (AND LARGELY RESPONSIBLE FOR PROGRESS MADE ON ITALIAN AWACS PARTICIPATION) IN WHICH HE WAS TOLD CANDIDLY THAT FURTHER APPROACHES ON LTDP WOULD ONLY IRRITATE THE MINISTER. IN
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CURRENT CIRCUMSTANCES D'AMBROSIO SAID ITALY WOULD HAVE TO KEEP MOST, IF NOT ALL, ITS RESERVATIONS. ONCE AWACS WAS OUT OF THE WAY, AND HAD BEEN "DIGESTED BY THE PARLIAMENT," IT SHOULD BE POSSIBLE TO BEGIN WORKING TOWARD DEVELOPING A MORE ACTIVE AND POSITIVE ITALIAN RESPONSE TO THE LTDP. "GIVE US A RESPITE OF A COUPLE OF MONTHS," HE SUGGESTED. P/M COUNSELOR REITERATED THAT

ITALIAN RESERVATIONS RELATED TO FUTURE COMMITMENT OF RESOURCES SEEMED ADEQUATELY COVERED BY LANGUAGE CONTAINED IN THE TEXT AND SHOULD NOT REQUIRE FOOTNOTING. MOREOVER, THE ITALIAN INTENTION TO INCREASE DEFENSE BUDGETING BY THREE PERCENT IN REAL TERMS WOULD SEEM TO OFFER THE RESOURCES NEEDED OVER THE LIFE OF THE PROGRAM. D'AMBROSIO REMARKED THAT THAT WOULD BE A POOR ARGUMENT TO USE WITH THE MOD ESTABLISHMENT. THERE WAS ALREADY CONSIDERABLE RESENTMENT OVER THE U.S. AND THE ALLIANCE "TELLING ITALY HOW TO SPEND ITS MONEY." AND THE ITALIAN MILITARY SERVICES WERE HUNGRILY ANTICIPATING ANY BUDGET INCREASES AS THE MEANS TO ACHIEVE NATIONAL PROGRAMS THAT HAVE BEEN POSTPONED BY THE IMPACT OF INFLATION.

3. COMMENT: FURTHER DEMARCHES TO THE GOI ON LTDP WOULD, IN OUR VIEW, BE COUNTERPRODUCTIVE. ANY NATO PROGRAM THAT COSTS MONEY IS A POLITICAL ISSUE, AND ITALIAN POLITICAL PRIORITIES ARE THESE DAYS PREPONDERANTLY INTROSPECTIVE. AS RECORDED IN REF A, MOD RUFFINI IS REPORTED TO HAVE SAID, "WHAT DO THEY WANT TO DO, PUSH US OUT OF THE ALLIANCE?" THAT WAS THE RHETORIC OF EXASPERATION. BUT SOME ITALIANS ALREADY THINK THAT THE BENEFITS OF ALLIANCE ARE NOT WORTH THE COST. KEY MEMBERS OF THE GOVERNMENT ARE NOT, HAPPILY, OF THAT PERSUASION. IT WOULD BE UNWISE, WE BELIEVE, TO FORCE THEM INTO WEIGHING THE IMPERATIVES OF DOMESTIC SURVIVAL AGAINST THE OBLIGATIONS OF FULL NATO

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MEMBERSHIP. THOUGH WE CONTINUE TO BELIEVE IT NECESSARY TO ASK ITALY TO PAY ITS FAIR SHARE OF THE COST OF COLLECTIVE SECURITY, UNDER CURRENT CONDITIONS IT MAY BE TOO MUCH TO EXPECT THAT IT WILL. IN SHORT, HAVING MADE OUR POINT, WE HAVE TO KNOW WHEN TO BACK OFF. GARDNER

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